

Hazardous Substances Advisory Committee (HSAC)

UKRI Funding for Chemicals Research

June 2020

Commission

Defra's International Chemicals Team is developing a proposal for a research programme on chemicals which requires interdisciplinary research and drawing on the capabilities and investments which span remits of multiple UKRI Research Councils. One UKRI funding which could support this programme is the Strategic Priorities Fund which facilitates cross-council working. However, it is currently uncertain if an additional wave of funding will be made available.

We would like committee members to:

1. **Review and comment** on the proposal for delivery through a further wave of the SPF or alternative route.
2. **Provide a letter of support** for the proposal (if it is supported by the committee)

Delivery

The committee will be sent a draft of the proposal in the run up to the 26th HSAC meeting (9th July). Please return comments as soon as is feasible. The International Chemicals team are also seeking comments from teams across Defra and across wider government departments and agencies. We will aim to implement reviewers' comments into a draft that will be discussed and finalised at the 26th HSAC meeting. Here there will be an opportunity for committee members to suggest any final changes to the text. If the committee find the proposal acceptable then they will be asked to draft a letter of support by 10th July to be used for Defra/UKRI approvals processes.

Background

The Strategic Priorities Fund

The Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) is one of the UK's largest, publicly funded, programmes of work to spearhead multi and inter disciplinary research and innovation.

Established in 2018 and led by UKRI, the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) aims to:

- drive an increase in high quality multi and interdisciplinary research and innovation
- ensure that UKRI's investment links up effectively with government research and innovation priorities and opportunities
- and ensure the system responds to strategic priorities and opportunities.

SPF builds on the vision of a 'common fund', to support high quality multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research programmes, which could have otherwise been missed through traditional funding channels.

There have been two waves of SPF funding which covers 34 programmes across the portfolio, all in different stages of their lifecycles. They are multi-million pound programmes providing research funding between £5 and 50 million. Previous Defra supported programmes include: Clean Air: Analysis and Solutions, Constructing a Digital Environment, UK Climate Resilience, Bacterial Plant Diseases, Greenhouse Gas Removal Demonstrators and the National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Programme.

It is yet to be determined whether there will be a third wave of funding.

More information on SPF and the current portfolio of projects can be found on the UKRI website here: <https://www.ukri.org/research/themes-and-programmes/strategic-priorities-fund/>

Policy linkage

Linking UKRI investment with government research and innovation priorities and opportunities is a key aim of the SPF. Consequently, research funding in this space could aim to support 25 Year Environment Plan objectives on chemicals, including the development of a Chemicals Strategy at this unique moment when the UK has left the European Union.